

Nov. 7 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the  
United Kingdom and an Exchange With Reporters  
November 7, 2001

*President Bush.* The last time we were standing here, I was getting ready to give an address to the United States Congress. And I knew then that the Prime Minister and the people he represents were going to be great friends of the United States in our mutual struggle against terrorism, and he has certainly proven that over the last weeks. We've got no better friend in the world than Great Britain. I've got no better person that I would like to talk to about our mutual concerns than Tony Blair. He brings a lot of wisdom and judgment as we fight evil.

He also is, like me, determined. Nothing will deter us in this all-important goal. We both recognize that we wage a fight to save civilization and that we must prevail—and not only must prevail, will prevail.

We've had a great discussion about progress in Afghanistan. I fully believe we're making great progress. I told the American people many times, and I've told the press corps many times that this is a struggle that's going to take a while, that it's not one of these Kodak moments. There is no moment to this; this is a long struggle and a different kind of war. But we're patient, and our close friends are patient, which is bad news for the Taliban and the people they harbor.

Secondly, we talked a lot about making sure that our great compassion for the innocents in Afghanistan is fulfilled. We must feed the people. And the Prime Minister has—every time I've talked to him, which is a lot, is constantly talking about how we make sure that we fulfill the mission, not only military but fulfill the mission of helping people in need. And also, we continue to discuss the vision of a post-Taliban Afghanistan and how do we make sure that all parties involved in that part of the world have a stake in the future. He's got a clear

vision; he is a strong friend; and I welcome him back to the White House.

*Prime Minister Blair.* First of all, can I say how pleased I am to be back at the White House in the company of President Bush and to have continued the discussions we've been having over these past weeks and continue them face to face. And can I thank him once again for his leadership and his strength at this time. And can I say to him, on behalf of the people of my country, but I believe people right across the world, that the determination to see that justice is done is every bit as strong today as it was on September the 11th.

The cause is just. The strategy is there. The determination is there, and there is a complete and total commitment to making sure that this is a battle in which we will prevail. And we will. I have no doubt about that at all.

What we've discussed already and will carry on discussing is, obviously, the military strategy in Afghanistan. We have discussed the humanitarian issues to make sure that we are doing everything we possibly can to help the plight of people in Afghanistan. And we should never forget that some 4½ million of them were refugees before the 11th of September.

We have discussed also the reconstruction of Afghanistan, how we make sure that after the present Taliban regime led by Mullah Omar is out of the way, that we construct a broad-based regime that is representative of all the different groupings in Afghanistan and offers some hope of stability and prosperity for that part of the world.

And we have, obviously, also discussed how important it is that, at this moment in time, we carry on building that strong coalition against international terrorism in

all its forms. And I believe that that coalition, if anything, is even stronger today.

Certainly, from the discussions I had with European leaders just a few days ago, their commitment is real, and their determination is also absolute to see this thing done. So can I once again thank President Bush very much for his kindness in welcoming me here.

*President Bush.* The Prime Minister has consented to take a couple of questions, as will I. We are going to enforce the one-question rule, however, Fournier [Ron Fournier, Associated Press]. And that is, you get to ask me or him a question. [Laughter]

Q. That's an Executive order?

*President Bush.* Well—[laughter].

*Prime Minister Blair.* It looks like it.

Are you going to go first, George, or what?

#### *Progress in the War on Terrorism*

Q. It has been 8 weeks since the September 11th attacks, and we don't know where Usama bin Laden is. It has been several weeks since the anthrax attacks, but we don't know who sent the letters. What do you say to Americans who might be frustrated and impatient despite your admonition about the "Kodak moment"?

*President Bush.* Yes. I will say to them, we fight a new kind of war. Never would we dream that someone would use our own airplanes to attack us and/or the mail to attack us. I will tell them that we have put a sound strategy in place that has got Usama bin Laden and the Al Qaida thugs on the run. And I will tell them that we will bring them to justice.

I can't tell them exactly when. But I will tell them that we will prevail. There's no question in my mind. We know he hides in caves, and we're shutting down caves. We know he moves around at night, and we're looking for him.

We know that, slowly but surely, the Taliban is crumbling; its defenses are crumbling; its folks are defecting. We know that

if you're on the frontline and if you're a Taliban soldier, you're likely to get injured, because we're relentless in our pursuit of the mission.

In terms of the anthrax, we don't know who did it yet. We do know it's a terrorist. Anybody who would use the mail to try to kill an American is a terrorist. But we do know this, Ron, that we've responded rapidly, that our health officials are performing really fine work. And I truly believe, as I've said many times, I believe they have saved a lot of lives. We know how to treat anthrax. And we now know we need sanitation machines in our post offices, machines to sanitize the mail, and we're putting those in.

We know that we're fighting evil. And the American people are patient. They've heard the call. And tomorrow night I'm going to put out an address that reminds the Nation that we're truly a great nation, that we've responded in ways that the enemy could never have imagined. And I'm so proud of the patience and steadfast nature of our people.

Mr. Prime Minister.

*Prime Minister Blair.* [Inaudible]—say a word on that?

*President Bush.* No, you can call on somebody.

*Prime Minister Blair.* Yes.

#### *Situation in the Middle East*

Q. Mr. President, since we're limited to only one leader, can I ask you whether you think you can win this struggle against terrorism without a settlement in the Middle East? And in view of the rather strident notes struck by both sides on the Prime Minister's tour of the Middle East last week, what do you think the United States can do to bring that resolution about?

*President Bush.* Of course we can win the war against Al Qaida.

Q. Without a Middle East settlement?

*President Bush.* Oh, I believe we can. I believe we're going to—we are hunting

them down as we speak, and we will bring them to justice.

But remember, the war is beyond just Afghanistan. There are over 60 Al Qaida organizations around the world. And today we struck a blow for freedom by cutting off their money—one of their money sources. And I'm absolutely convinced we can.

Having said that, however, we are both working hard to try to bring peace to the Middle East. My Secretary of State, who is here, spends enormous amounts of time on the phone with both parties, urging for there to be calm so that we can get into the Mitchell process. There is a process in place that will lead to peace, called Mitchell. It has been embraced by all or most of the nations of the world, and we are working hard to get us into the Mitchell process.

There is no doubt in my mind—no doubt in my mind—we will bring Al Qaida to justice, peace or no peace in the Middle East.

*Prime Minister Blair.* Can I just say a word on that? There is no way whatever in which our action in Afghanistan is conditional on progress in the Middle East. And indeed, one of the things that bin Laden wants to do is to try and hijack the Palestinian cause for his own purposes.

Now, we are taking the action in Afghanistan, and I believe, incidentally, people are patient about this. I think they understand this is not a conventional conflict; it is not fought in a conventional way. It takes a lot of strategy and planning and determination over a period of time to be successful. But be under no doubt at all: Our objectives, which is to close down that terrorist network in Afghanistan, those objectives will be achieved.

Now, even though it is not conditional in any sense, of course we want to see progress in the Middle East. That's why we are devoting enormous amounts of time to it. And I believe it is possible to see how we can make progress in the Middle

East. And I described some of the ways that could happen when I was in the Middle East last week. So be under no doubt, either, that, irrespective of the action in Afghanistan, it is in everybody's interest that we make progress in the Middle East, and we will strain every sinew we possibly can to do so.

#### *Nuclear Arms Reduction/ABM Treaty*

*Q.* Mr. President, have you decided on a figure for how far you can cut the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile, and do you agree with President Putin, who said that a common approach can be devised for interpreting the ABM Treaty to allow for missile defense without abandoning the treaty?

And if Mr. Blair could address the issue of, would a failure to reach an arms agreement undermine the momentum of the international coalition?

*President Bush.* So much for Executive orders. [Laughter]

*Q.* It was an umbrella question. [Laughter]

*President Bush.* Oh, it was an umbrella question.

I think it's best that I share with Mr. Putin the acceptable level of offensive weapons with him, before I do with you. And so I'm going to reserve—I'm not going to tell you until I tell him. [Laughter]

*Q.* Have you reached a decision?

*Prime Minister Blair.* And then, I guess I had better not, either.

*President Bush.* I have reached a decision. And I've spent time thinking about the issue. I've told the American people that the United States will move to reduce our offensive weapons to a level commensurate with being able to keep the peace and, at the same time, much lower levels than have been negotiated in previous arms control agreements. We don't need an arms control agreement to convince us to reduce our nuclear weapons down substantially, and I'm going to do it. And I can't wait

to share that information with the President. I will do so.

Listen, the ABM Treaty is outmoded and outdated, and we need to move beyond it. It's exactly what I've been telling the President ever since I've been meeting with him, and my position has not changed. And if he's got some interesting suggestions on how to make the ABM Treaty not outdated and not outmoded, I'm more than willing to listen.

But our Nation and this terrorist war says to me more than ever that we need to develop defenses to protect ourselves against weapons of mass destruction that might fall in the hands of terrorist nations. If Afghanistan or if the Taliban had a weapon that was able to deliver a weapon of mass destruction, we might be talking a little different tune about our progress against Al Qaida than we are today.

So it's important for us to be able to develop defenses that work. And the ABM Treaty prevents us from doing that.

#### *Open Skies Agreements*

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, I'd like to divert your attention a little bit away from military conflicts toward the economic side of things. I'd like to ask you if you've had a chance at all to ask the President if they would formally launch open skies agreements and, if not, if that means that the UK's position is now that the EU is going to be handling this matter?

*Prime Minister Blair.* No. I mean, no doubt we will discuss these issues, but we haven't yet.

*President Bush.* We haven't had dinner yet.

Q. But does that mean that the EU is going to be in charge of it now?

*Prime Minister Blair.* No, it doesn't mean that at all.

#### *Operation Enduring Freedom*

Q. Mr. President, could I ask a question of your guest? But feel free to jump in if you so desire.

*President Bush.* It depends on what the question is.

Q. Well, sir, it is a multiple-part question, for which I am famous. But anyway, Prime Minister, as you know, the air war in Afghanistan is one month old today. There are many experts on both sides of the Atlantic who believe that the air war is limited in its ability to really inflict a decisive blow against the Taliban. Many say the only way you can defeat the Taliban is to put boots on the ground. One, do you agree? And two, are you willing to commit large numbers of British troops, beyond the SAS and the Royal Marines, to the effort to defeat the Taliban?

*Prime Minister Blair.* Well, first of all, let me say something to you I often say to our own media when I am asked a question about the precise nature of our military operations. And that is that I have learned in these situations that it is not a sensible thing to discuss in detail the types of military operation that you may undertake, for very obvious reasons.

But we are completely committed to seeing this thing through. I think people know that the strategy has to encompass more than airstrikes alone. Although, do not underestimate the enormous damage that is now being done to Taliban frontline troops, because that is where the air power is being concentrated. But of course, there are other operations that we will mount as well. And there are, obviously, the support and the assistance that we are giving to the Northern Alliance. There are the measures that we are taking of a political and diplomatic nature as well.

And when you said a moment or two ago that the airstrikes were just—and the conflict was a month old, I think it is probably just as well to reflect upon that for a moment. It is simply a month old. And we have begun this action. We have taken it at a number of different levels. I think it is already having a huge impact.

Some of the information that I have seen—I think sometimes people don’t always reflect on maybe enough when we state it to people—but literally, we have destroyed virtually all the terrorist training camps of Al Qaida. We have destroyed an enormous amount of the military infrastructure of the Taliban. Their air power, insofar as it exists, is completely taken out. We therefore have a very, very strong situation from which to move forward. And I think what is—what is different about this conflict is that every part of it has to come together; in other words, not just the military part but also the support for those parties in opposition to the Taliban, and the political and diplomatic aspects that help build a strong coalition that can secure the objectives we want to see. And I have absolutely no doubt at all that we will achieve the objectives that we want.

And those objectives are very simple. Sometimes people say to me, “Well, you know, clarify the military objectives.” There’s no difficulty about doing that at

all. It’s Al Qaida and the terrorist network shut down; it’s the Taliban regime out; it’s a new regime in that is broad-based; and it’s a decent future for the people of Afghanistan, based on some stability and progress, not based on a regime that oppresses its people, treats its people appallingly, is a threat to regional stability, and basically thrives on the drugs trade.

Now, I think those are pretty clear objectives, and I’ve absolutely no doubt at all that we will achieve them in full, and we will not let up until we do.

*President Bush.* Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:15 p.m. in the Cross Hall at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and President Vladimir Putin of Russia. The President also referred to the Report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, chaired by former Senator George J. Mitchell, issued April 30.

## Letter to Congressional Leaders on Proposed “Armies of Compassion” Legislation

November 7, 2001

*Dear Mr. Leader:*

Since September 11, Americans have come together to help meet our national needs in this time of great crisis. They have given more than \$1 billion to disaster relief efforts and many Americans have volunteered their time. Although individual generosity is evident everywhere, thousands of our Nation’s charities, paradoxically, have been suffering. Donations to organizations not directly involved in disaster relief have declined dramatically. Soup kitchens are low on food. Mentoring programs for needy children are low on dollars. America’s charities have stood by America—it is now time for America to stand by her charities, as

they suffer from the economic consequences of September 11.

I believe the Congress must address these issues now. We must pass and sign into law an “Armies of Compassion” bill this year that encourages and supports charitable giving, removes unneeded barriers to government support for community and faith-based groups, and authorizes important initiatives to help those in need. The House of Representatives has already advanced key elements of this agenda, and Senators Santorum and Lieberman have made great strides on consensus legislation.